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"Because the languages prioritized for documentation are often deeply significant for their speakers as emblems of identity, the movement to study endangered languages has had the salutary effect of rehumanizing linguistics, making it all but impossible to abstract the speakers away regardless of what science might seem to require. [...] Respecting the interests of speakers therefore demands a willingness not only to build relationships across difference, but to approach these relationships analytically."

(Dobrin & Berson 2011: 207)

Reflections on ethics: Re-humanizing linguistics, building relationships across difference

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Himmelmann (1998) uses the word 'ethics' only once, but his arguments for proposing a field of documentary linguistics reflect assumptions about ethical stances that have been addressed in linguistics publications since 1998. This paper begins by outlining some of these ethical assumptions, and then focuses on considerations closely connected to what Dobrin & Berson (2011: 207) refer to as "re-humanizing linguistics" and "building relationships across difference". The paper suggests that ethical language documentation work must be grounded in considerations of the human nature of research relationships, the histories of interactions between peoples which inform those research relationships, and varying conceptions of knowledge. Since language documentation work inevitably has social consequences for human beings, aligning language documentation practice with Indigenous research paradigms which emphasize *relational accountability* (Wilson 2008: 99), allows for a practice based on respect, reciprocity and responsibility and ultimately leads to good documentation.

1. Introduction[1] In defining a field of documentary linguistics, Himmelmann (1998) uses the word 'ethics' only once, in a list of (sub-)disciplines that, in his words, determine and

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influence the "makeup and contents of a language documentation." In this list, which includes sociological and anthropological approaches to languages, "hardcore" linguistics (theoretical, comparative, descriptive), and language acquisition, he places ethics in a category with language rights and language planning (Himmelmann 1998: 167). While Himmelmann's motivations for distinguishing documentary from descriptive linguistics and for providing a format for language documentation do not explicitly name ethical considerations, his arguments implicitly reflect assumptions about ethical stances; many of these have been addressed in linguistics publications since 1998.

In this reflection, I begin by outlining ethical considerations implicitly or explicitly raised in Himmelmann. Taking a cue from dictionary definitions of ethics, one could say that thinking about ethics with relation to language documentation involves thinking about how to construct a good language record while acting in a good and right way, informed by the particular social and cultural circumstances of the researcher(s), speaker(s), the language being documented, and its community of practice. My focus here is on issues connected to speakers, communities, and researchers, and what Dobrin & Berson (2011: 207) refer to as "re-humanizing linguistics" and "building relationships across difference".

The number of researchers doing language documentation work on their own community's languages is increasing;[2] however, most published discussions of ethics in language documentation have been written by academically-situated researchers (often from settler-colonial societies like the USA), who are outsiders to the language communities being documented. This paper reflects these limitations: it is informed by my personal and intellectual background, as a Polish-Canadian academic linguist with more than 30 years experience in northwestern North America, including working collaboratively with language communities, activists, knowledge keepers, teachers and learners engaged in language revitalization. Nevertheless, regardless of one's background, thinking about what it means to build relationships across difference is a necessary part of ethically-informed language documentation work. Ethical work must be grounded in considerations of the human nature of research relationships, the histories of interactions between peoples which inform those research relationships, and conceptions of knowledge. Reflection opens the possibility of acting to shift social relations in research, creating space for multiple perspectives, values and worldviews and thus shaping the documentary linguistic work in ways that might transform institutional practice, de-colonize research methodologies (in the sense of Smith 2012) and thus support the production of good documentation.

2. Himmelmann (1998) Himmelmann begins by writing that "the present reflections have been occasioned in part by the recent surge of interest in endangered languages [...] and the concomitant call for descriptive work on these languages" (1998: 161). The call Himmelmann refers to includes work such as that of Hale, Krauss, England, Craig, Watahomigie & Yamamoto (1992). This paper, which appeared in *Language,* was particularly influential in calling attention to the pace at which many languages were undergoing shift as a result of pressure from outside forces (e.g., colonization and globalization) and in making a strong case for the need for a "responsible" linguistics that pays attention to the expectations of linguistics, understood as a science, and to the rights,

[2]See e.g., Florey 2018 on the DRIL training program in Australia; Fitzgerald & Linn 2013 on Breath of Life workshops in Oklahoma; Zepeda and Hill 1998 on being a community linguist; Hale 1972 on training native speakers in linguistics.

needs, and agency of the speakers of the languages being documented, especially given the pace of language loss. Thus, England (p. 32) discusses "intellectual, scholarly, and political responsibilities to [an endangered] language and the people who speak it"; Craig (p. 23) discuss issues of self-respect and community empowerment, and commitment to linguistic and cultural rights; Watahomigie & Yamamoto (p. 11) acknowledge the agency of speakers of endangered languages in decisions concerning the languages that they speak and propose the possibility of collaborative models of working with language communities.

Himmelmann himself "[…] presume[s] without further discussion that the interests and rights of contributors and the speech community should take precedence over scientific interests" (1998: 172). In this he echoes Wilkins (1992: 189) who states that "…academic linguistic concerns are never so important that they should be allowed to undermine […] the rights of the host community."[3] This is an ethical stance, from which it follows that requirements for a good language documentation must include access to and accessibility of the language documentation (including fieldnotes and recordings) and ensuring that the documentation is of use for a variety of purposes, including not only those of language-related disciplines, but also those of speech communities involved in maintenance and (re)vitalization of their languages. In distinguishing documentary from descriptive work, Himmelmann argues that many forms of language descriptions are useful primarily to "grammatically oriented and comparative linguists"; he then argues that language documentation involving collections of primary data "[…] have at least the potential of being of use to a larger group of interested parties. These include the speech community itself […]" (1998: 163). In Himmelmann's paper, then, language documentation is seen as being a better (where "better" arguably means "more ethical") response to language loss than language description, and this, in turn, affects the methods and forms proposed for constructing a good documentary record.

In addition to referring to community interests, Himmelmann (1998) also considers the rights of communities and individuals, including rights to privacy, community control, copyright and ownership, "secrecy", protection of cultural taboos, and prevention of exploitation. These lead to methodological questions about how to edit, curate and archive documentary materials, including ensuring that archived materials do not violate people's rights to privacy. He also raises questions about community participation in documentary projects, asking how communities can be "actively involved in the design of a concrete documentation project from the very beginning," even though community ideas about documentation and outside researcher plans may not always agree; finally, he discusses whether and how outside researchers should be involved in language maintenance work "which may be of greater interest to the community than just a documentation" (1998: 188-189). Himmelmann's arguments and discussions thus include considerations about the responsibilities of language work and workers to speakers and their communities.

3. The human side of fieldwork Recognizing this human, socially-situated side of fieldwork (and of documentation based on fieldwork) is not new. For example, Samarin, who writes from a relatively researcher-focused perspective, says in his 1967 textbook on linguistic fieldwork:

> There are obviously questions of ethics when one assumes a role and states a purpose in a community. […] A more specific question is this: how

[3]Wilkins (1992: 189) also states that academic concerns should not undermine the personal ethics and sanity of the fieldworker.

> can a linguistic investigator take from the people of a community a vast amount of data—much of it given free, all of it given in good will, with the hope perhaps, that it will do them or their children some good—and use it exclusively in scientific publications which in themselves can serve no practical purpose? To some degree the linguist is obliged to his helpers to meet their expectations. Looking upon linguistics as an "objective" science does not make us less dependent on human beings for its pursuit, nor does it make us less obligated to use our findings for the satisfaction of their desires. How all of this is done is, of course, a matter of personal decision. (p. 16–17)

This quote reflects the extent to which language documentation is dependent on the human element, on relationships between the human beings and communities involved, on knowledge and training, expertise, purpose, needs, expectations, agency and power dynamics. As a result, I would argue, *contra* Samarin, that how language researchers respond to the recognition that language documentation work is dependent on human beings cannot simply be "a matter of personal decision"; I would also suggest that it is not sufficient to assume that linguistics is only and always an "objective" science.

In fact, since Himmelmann (1998), ethical considerations connected to the human side of language documentation work have been amongst the most intensely and extensively discussed issues in the literature on documentary linguistics: how to act ethically and how to undertake ethical research in language documentation are being debated and taught in the literature in linguistics, in workshop settings and institutes (like the Institute for Collaborative Language Research (CoLang)), in classrooms, and in language communities. The beginning quote from Dobrin & Berson (2011) thus reflects an increased focus within writings about the intellectual conceptualization and practice of language documentation since 1998.[4] This increased focus has been influenced by the move in linguistics, particularly since 1998, away from "the generally counterdocumentary trend" that began in "the mainstream of linguistics" in the 1950s (Woodbury 2011: 167). It has also been influenced by work pointing out that language documentation is not historically, politically, socially or culturally neutral, and is not simply an intellectual act (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009: 33-39). Documentation work often occurs in contexts in which the languages being documented are from small communities, many of them Indigenous, that have been marginalized (e.g., by forms of economic or other types of oppression and colonization). Therefore, language documentation work inevitably has social consequences for human beings and this requires particular attention to ethical positions.[5]

There are at least three categories of questions in the literature on ethical issues in language documentation. The first involves issues relating to rights and access: this

[4]This focus is evident when one examines books about linguistic fieldwork published in the last twenty years, all of which have extensive chapters on ethics, (e.g., Bowern 2008, Crowley & Thieberger 2007, Chelliah & de Reuse 2010, Sakel & Everett 2012, Tsunoda 2005), as do collections of articles on fieldwork and language documentation: e.g., Thieberger (2011) contains a broad overview of ethical issues in linguistic fieldwork including issues related to "ethics codes, individuals, communities, languages, and knowledge systems" (Rice 2011; see also Rice 2006 on rights and obligations in documentary work).

[5]Thus, Dorian writes that "[s]cientists of many stripes like to consider their undertakings apolitical and their professional activities objective and impartial", but language work is "inevitably a political act" (Dorian 1993: 575), while Hale says that "[t]he scientific investigation of a language cannot be understood in isolation" (Hale 2001: 76). Dobrin & Berson (2011: 188) also suggest "[…]treating linguistic resesarch not as a value-neutral apprehension of intrinsic facts about human symbolic life, but rather as a historically contingent social activity through which linguistics constitutes itself as a discipline (Latour 2005)."

includes consideration of the form, content and value of ethics protocols (e.g., Rice 2012; van Driem 2016), ownership, control, access, protection, copyright, consent, rights and responsibilities to documentation (e.g., Newman 2012; Dorian 2010; Warner et al. 2007), archival research (Innes 2010), legacy resources (O'Meara & Good 2010), and respecting privacy (Macri & Sacramento 2010).

A second, and larger, category of publications is related to the diversity of languages, language contexts and documentary situations, ideologies, people and their responses involved in language documentation work. Thus Wilkins (1992: 188-189) writes "It is important to realise that the social, cultural, political, physical, and historical contexts in which linguists do fieldwork are probably more remarkable for their differences than their similarities. Just as remarkable is the diversity of people who undertake linguistic fieldwork". This point is echoed by Woodbury (2011: 159), who says that "above all, humans experience their own and other people's languages viscerally and have differing stakes, purposes, goals and aspirations for language records and language documentation." Couzens & Eira (2014: 314) point out that linguistics work in communities is "deeply cross-cultural, requiring as it does a productive understanding and connection between sets of ideologies formed for very different purposes, from within very different social and intellectual heritages." Consequently, this diversity and the uniqueness of each documentary situation requires that documentation work must be appropriate to each particular situation (Dobrin et al. 2009: 46-47; Macri 2010).

Perhaps the most debated and discussed theme related to ethics in language documentation in the last 20 years, however, is connected to questioning the extent to which language documentation does or does not require collaborative forms of research, particularly when collaboration involves linguists from outside the language community working with community member language speakers. It is impossible here to do justice to all the discussions focused on this topic (the 2018 *Trends in Linguistics* volume edited by Bischoff & Jany on community-based research provides an excellent overview). These discussions have included sustained arguments for collaborative forms of language documentation work as responses to the Hale et al. (1992) call for a responsible linguistics with social justice as one of its goals. They also have included the defining and elaboration of particular collaborative models such as Participatory Action Research, Community-Based (Language) Research, Empowerment Research, etc. (e.g., Benedicto et al. 2002; Dwyer 2006; Yamada 2007; Penfield et al. 2008; Czaykowska-Higgins 2009; Leonard & Haynes 2010). Studies that illustrate collaboration on particular projects (e.g., Linn et al. 1998; Guérin & Lacrampe 2010; Cruz & Woodbury 2014; Akumbu 2018; Heaton & Xoyon 2018; Junker 2018; other articles in Bischoff & Jany 2018) have also been published, as have discussions of more specific aspects of work involving (outsider) linguists and communities: for example, Stebbins (2012) discusses the differing roles that linguists play within the language communities and universities where they work; Gerdts (2010) discusses the role of the linguist in language revitalization programs; Rice (2011) considers relations with communities in documentary work; Benedicto (2018) lays out challenges associated with aligning the values of collaborative research with those of the academy. Much of this literature sees ethical language documentation work as needing to meet the demands of both documentation and revitalization (e.g., Grenoble 2009: 65) and therefore as requiring community involvement. For Dobrin & Berson (2011: 187) "[…] contemporary documentation in linguistics can usefully be thought of as a kind of social movement" which is "increasingly applied, cognizant of context, and committed to social good". Dobrin & Berson see this social movement as having brought academic

linguists "into a shared space with communities of speakers, researchers working in other disciplines and non-academic institutions, and the public at large". In this shared space, power imbalances have the potential to be addressed and redressed and the roles of researcher and researched can be re-made. One way to do this is by considering to what extent one's research practice reflects what Canadian Indigenous scholars refer to as the *Rs*: *respect* between the actors; some measure of *reciprocity* and sense of *responsibility* to the other; the extent to which language documentation is of *relevance* to non-academic as well as academic audiences; and, whether the research involves some element of trust and accountability to *relationships* (e.g., Kirkness & Barnhardt 2001; Wilson 2008; see also Rice 2012, 2018; Czaykowska-Higgins et al. 2018).

Critiques of collaborative models for language documentation have focused on the fact that much of the work on collaborative endeavours in language documentation comes out of societies in which colonization took the form of settlement (particularly, in North and South America, Australia, New Zealand). The most significant point emerging out of critiques is that every language documentation situation is different and therefore collaboration is not necessarily appropriate in every context (e.g., Childs et al. 2014; Crippen & Robinson 2013; Dobrin 2008; Stenzel 2014; Good 2012; Holton 2009). However, if one conceives of collaboration in research, not as a methodology but rather as a philosophy of, or an orientation to research (Ferreira & Gendron 2011: 154 in Rice 2018: 32), and if one assumes that at the heart of all language documentation lies the question of how to enact mutual respect for people, places, relationships, differences in goals, approaches, and methods, then this research orientation allows for multiple ways of understanding collaboration, and thus multiple ways of implementing a philosophy that values human beings and the building of healthy research relationships across difference.

4. What comes next? As mentioned above, Himmelmann's (1998) motivations for proposing a field of documentary linguistics include arguments for the urgency to document languages before they are "lost forever". Unquestionably this moral focus on the seriousness of pressures facing languages has brought unprecedented attention in the public sphere, in public national policy decisions, and internationally in such fora as United Nations, UNESCO and the European Union to the need to support languages. This attention has also resulted in increased funding for language documentation. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of endangerment's focus on language death, loss and weakness (cf., Hill 2002, Errington 2003, Moore 2006, and Perley 2012) runs the risk of perpetuating a colonial narrative in which language speakers and their communities are being acted upon by outside forces and have no agency. An endangerment narrative thus has the potential to reinforce, rather than transform or dismantle, power imbalances between academic outsider researchers and language speakers and their communities. Moreover, the strength and momentum of the language revitalization and reclamation movement (Leonard 2011, 2017) and its relationship, for instance, to the Indigenous human rights movement contrast with a deficit model of language shift and provide arguments in favor of an understanding of language vitality that focuses on resilience (Fitzgerald 2017). In addition, attention to language endangerment, with its focus on enumerating "dying" languages and its understanding of languages as entities which can be objectively delineated and which correspond directly to delineated communities, has been argued to be inappropriate in situations where language boundaries are fluid and where there are high degrees of multilingualism, as in parts of Africa (see, for instance, Ngué Um 2015, Lüpke 2017, Childs et al. 2014, Di Carlo 2016, DiCarlo & Good 2017; cf. Makoni &

Pennycook 2006). In the next few years, therefore, discussion of language endangerment, vitality and ecologies (cf. *Language* 93(4) issue) is likely to influence thinking about ethical engagement in language documentation and about appropriate documentary methodologies around the world.

A second discussion likely to shape the forms of documentations is related to questions about what constitutes linguistic knowledge, how language and its study can/should be understood, and how to bring together Euro-American knowledge systems, epistemologies, and worldviews with those that are not found in the Euro-American academic establishment (e.g., see Rice 2012, Dwyer 2010, Eira & Stebbins 2008, Dobrin & Berson 2011). In relation to Indigenous knowledges, for instance, Leonard (2017: 19) makes the case, following Stebbins (2014) that "[…] Western ideas of language work inherently become elevated over Indigenous ideas when they are uncritically adopted as self-evident, explanatory, and/or accurate." He further argues that "[…] even well-intentioned Indigenous language work will perpetuate colonial power structures when its products demote ideas from Indigenous communities relative to those of the Western academy, a process Smith (2012: 62) describes as 'establishing the positional superiority of Western knowledge"' (Leonard 2017: 20). In language documentation contexts there is thus a challenge to colonial mindsets and systems of power in academic research as well as more generally (cf., Couzens & Eira 2014; Kovach 2009; Land 2015; Leonard 2017; Smith 2012; Wilson 2008). Consequently, ethical considerations in language documentation require thinking about, re-examining, and expanding conceptions of language and science, and of what and how to document.[6]

Thinking about how to document, Dobrin & Schwartz (2016) propose that, to conduct socially responsible documentary language research, it might be useful to use the anthropological method of *participant observation*,[7] which acknowledges the centrality of social relations to research practice from a Euro-American anthropological perspective. Another way to think about social relations in language research, however, would be to align language documentation practice with Indigenous research paradigms which emphasize *relational accountability*, defined in Wilson (2008: 99), who says "[…] methodology needs to be based in a community context (be relational) and has to demonstrate respect, reciprocity and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)." From this perspective, the relational is not seen as a bias, but rather, "[…] the relational is viewed as an aspect of methodology" (Kovach 2008: 41). Thus, rehumanizing linguistics, acknowledging the centrality of relationships and difference in language documentation work, emphasizing accountability to those relationships, and grounding ethical research methodologies in social relations is one way that documentary linguistics can continue to move towards de-colonizing, transformative practice.

[6]Wesley Leonard, Megan Lukaniec and Adrienne Tsikewa, three Native American linguists organized a Linguistic Society of America-Society for the Study of Indigenous Languages of the Americas Workshop in 2018 entitled "Expanding Linguistic Science by Broadening Native American Participation." The workshop, which brought together 40 Native American linguists, community scholars and non-Native linguists, focused on "identifying, valorizing, and disseminating the intellectual tools and cultural values of [language] communities as a way to improve linguistic science."

[7]Defined as "[…] a research method that is designed specifically to deal with the interpersonal nature of fieldwork in the human sciences [… that] ties knowledge production directly to the development of social relations." Dobrin & Schwartz (2016: 253)

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